

JZ Microphones BT-201/3S Small-Diaphragm Condenser Stereo Kit

JZ's first small-diaphragm condenser microphone features unique design elements and a "pleasantly different" sound.

Juris Zarins and his namesake company, JZ, consistently offer useful microphone designs featuring a touch of interesting funkiness. Their new small-diaphragm stereo condenser mic, the BT-201, is no exception. I find it to be a unique, yet versatile, winner.



Features

For this review, I received a BT-201 matched-pair package, officially called the BT-201/3S kit by JZ (\$1,349 list). Each BT-201 offers a relatively large shaft for a SDC "cigar mic," narrowing down to a 8mm "neck" diameter before expanding back out to the shaft's width at the mic capsule. This may or may not reduce diffraction at the capsule, but when used as a pair, the BT-201 design does allow for some easier X/Y placement and enables the execution of its top feature: magnetically secured, interchangeable capsules. Cardioid, soft cardioid and omni are provided in the matched pair kit (soft cardioid capsules with a -20 dB pad are also available separately), all of which are contained in a luxurious wood box featuring a magnetic clasp.

In Use

On drums using cardioid capsules (overheads in ORTF or as a spaced pair on ride/hi-hat), the BT-201s exhibited a slightly emphasized top end that didn't get harsh or strident and never required

any subtractive EQ (not even on a "pingy" ride). Their mids were respectably flat and the bottom was a little lean and tight, yet reasonably full for SDCs. High SPLs were handled with no problem (the BT-201 can take up to 140 dB).

I also tried the BT-201s as overheads with soft cardioid capsules; again, the capsules sounded great, but they revealed some unwanted qualities in my room. I personally preferred the omni caps for ride and hat; they were even smoother and natural sounding. On a 13 x 3.5-inch piccolo snare drum, I taped the BT201 (with cardioid cap) to a beyer M-201 snare mic (just like I might normally pair an AKG C451 and a Shure SM57) and got nice results: good proximity effect on the bottom end with less "splat" on the top end than a C451 would provide.

While I liked the BT-201 pair on acoustic guitar, they were a little "forward" and a bit too lean. They did provide a detailed sound for finger picking; self-noise almost became an issue on a very quiet performance. With omni caps, they did sound a bit thicker and would work



well with a darker-sounding acoustic guitar — like a Martin, for example. The BT-201 pair was markedly different from my C451 or Neumann KM 184 pairs; it was not quite as focused with a little more low/mid body. Although the BT-201s may not have the oomph for solo acoustic guitar, I wouldn't hesitate to use them for ensemble pieces where their voicing would help backing tracks sit just right.

On my Yamaha upright piano, the BT-201s delighted me. We tried it all — X/Y, ORTF and spaced pair, each with cardioid,

soft cardioid, and omni caps — before finally settling on a spaced pair of omnis. Here, the BT-201s provided a fine soundstage with plenty of width, depth, realism and openness. Coupled with a ribbon mic in the middle for some needed thickness, my little piano sounded quite balanced and, dare I say it, closer to a grand piano than you could imagine (I usually use only a pair of cardioid large-diaphragm condensers on this piano).

Regrettably, the BT-201/3S kit isn't "accessorized" as I would prefer — they

come without clips (luckily, Shure SM 58 clips fit them), windscreens or shockmounts (although the JZ1-7 shockmount is available from JZ), or even a manual, a seemingly odd oversight. But since they do come with those three capsules — hot-swappable even with phantom power applied — they offer a neat and utilitarian feature that transforms the package from good to excellent. Maybe JZ could put together an accessory kit with all of these aforementioned "missing" accessories and a stereo bar? Doing so would make

the BT-201 package an excellent proposition for even more applications.

Summary

In a crowded field of small-diaphragm condensers, JZ Microphones offered something pleasantly different with the BT-201/3S kit. In the presence of BT-201s, my trusty C451s face some serious competition.

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mini review by Richard Alan Salz

Radial SGI Studio Guitar Interface System



I know I'm not the only person around who has tried the old 100-foot guitar cable trick: You know, the one where you run the really long cable from the guitar player in the control room to the live room (or iso booth) where the amp is. Like me, you've probably noticed that it doesn't work very well; you get lots of hum and other noise or the guitar player remarks on the "dead" feeling of his normally lively rig. Enter the Radial Studio Guitar Interface (SGI) system [\$300 list].

Features

The SGI is a two-part solution comprising the SGI-TX transmitter and the SGI-RX receiver. Built to Radial's extremely high quality standards, both are very heavy yellow boxes, like steel bricks. The SGI-TX requires power from the included wall wart adapter, and, like some of the other Radial guitar-oriented boxes, there's the somewhat-enigmatic Drag control. Don't worry, you won't be wearing a skirt if you turn it up; instead you'll notice some pleasing tonal variations that allow you to darken the tone and change the "feeling" of the guitar/amp interface through some impedance-matching mojo. The

passive SGI-RX has an essential ground lift button.

In Use

Operation couldn't be easier. Plug into the TX's input from your guitar (or bass) with a standard 1/4-inch instrument cable, connect an XLR microphone cable between the TX and the RX, find your signal in perfect condition at the output of the RX, and plug into your amp — done. For this review, I used a 50-foot Gotham GAC-3 mic cable and the excellent Vovox Link Protect A (5-meter length) for the instrument cable.

Radial claims that the SGI can drive up to 500 feet of balanced cable. Being the natural skeptic that I am, I decided to give it a try. In a happy coincidence, I had just constructed 10 50-foot mic cables using Gotham GAC3 cable and Neutrik XLR connectors. So, I set up the SGI-TX in my control room, plugged in my 1980 Les Paul and connected the output of the RX into a Polytone Mini-Brute close-miked with a Violet Design Amethyst Classic condenser mic.

There was virtually no difference between the sound of 50-foot and 500-foot lengths of cable (as well as the inter-

mediate lengths). That's not to say that there was no difference between a straight 15-foot cable right into the amp and the SGI chain; there was a slight attenuation in volume, and a minor tonal shift. All in all, the difference between the two setups was extremely minor, and only noticeable if you were listening for it. The Drag control further narrowed the gap.

Already impressed, I tried the same setup with a FBB Custom fretless bass loaded with a single Bartolini Humbucker and an active onboard preamp to see how the SGI coped with an active instrument. As expected, the SGI sounded great and proved to be a useful addition to the session.

Summary

As has been the case with other Radial Engineering products I have used (and purchased) in the past, the operation and build quality of the SGI system was literally without fault. Highly recommended!

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